

## Dominican Republic and Baseball

BY BEAU WEBSTER

Have you ever wondered why famous Red Sox names have gone from Ted Williams and Carlton Fisk to Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz? Well, Ted came from San Diego, California, and Carlton comes from Bellows Falls, Vermont. Both Manny and David come from the Dominican Republic. Why has this happened? Why are so many players coming from this place south of our border? There are several reasons.

The United States introduced baseball to Cuba in 1860. Very soon Cuba had a ten year war with Spain for independence, and many Cubans left for other Caribbean countries, taking baseball with them. It became the sport to play on the southeast coast of the Dominican Republic. From October to January the sugar mills are slow. Mill owners encouraged the game and gave money. That was the turning point for baseball in the country, but it did not get international attention until the 1950's with the success of Juan Marichal and the 3 Alou brothers.

Kids in the Dominican Republic only go to school for half a day and since it is eighty degrees most of the year, they can play outside all the time. While the boys sometimes play other games, the overwhelming favorite is baseball, and most of them join in. There are a few leagues for older boys, but most of the younger ones play pickup ball for hours, often using only a stick and a bottle cap or anything else they can get their hands on.

There is very little television in the country, so the kids don't have much access to it. Most don't have game systems or computers. The Dominican Republic is a very poor place so the boys need to find ways to have fun that don't cost much. For baseball, all they need is an empty piece of land and whatever they have for materials.

In the Dominican Republic all the best athletes play ball and don't switch to other sports. Successful players are big role models for the kids, and, like Christian Guzman, retired second baseman for the Twins, they often go back home and help coach younger players. These players often see ball as a way out of poverty. The average yearly income there is about a thousand dollars, so starting players are happy to work for very little.

Today every major league team has a training camp in the Dominican Republic to scout and train players. At least one in six

players in the American League comes from this country, more than all the other Caribbean countries combined.

So, the next time you go to the ball park, read the sports section, or watch sports on television, you will know why so many players come from the Dominican Republic. And maybe you will get some of their incredible passion for the sport of baseball.



by Bryce Fletcher

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